

Travel Advisory to Federal Employees

News Release U.S. General Services Administration

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GSA Issues Travel Advisory to Federal Employees

Washington, DC ?Today, the U.S. General Services Administration issued the following travel advisory to federal travelers and federal travel managers:

"It's time to start flying again," said President Bush when he announced the reopening of Reagan National Airport. The reopening of this airport signals that travel has returned to normal and America is getting on-board. The federal government and the Nation are resuming daily routines and conducting "business as usual."

Recent events have produced heightened security at our airports and reinforced the need for travelers to be aware of safety precautions. For example, some major changes for travelers include:

- All passengers should arrive at least 2 hours before departure and can expect long waits at airport security checkpoints.
- Only ticketed passengers, including e-ticketed passengers, are permitted through security checkpoints.
- Stringent curbside security exists at airports throughout the country.
- There are tougher restrictions concerning carry-on baggage.

The General Services Administration (GSA) is committed to providing you with timely travel information you need to know. GSA's Office of Government wide Policy (OGP) is responsible for managing the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) which is a valuable tool for all federal travelers and their administrative officers. The FTR contains established guidance for federal travelers and it answers questions that travelers face daily.

We have received numerous questions during the past few weeks from federal travelers who were traveling during the recent terrorist events. Virtually every question we received could be answered through the established guidelines in the FTR. We encourage federal agencies to communicate with their travelers about the procedures available in the FTR. OGP has developed the attached Travel Advisory in Question and Answer format to make it easier for our customer agencies to share information with their individual travelers.

Our goal is to provide the policy and structure to ensure the safe and effective travel of federal employees. The FTR does that. However, the FTR is only effective if it is understood. GSA wants to do whatever we can to help our customers understand it.

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Each of us has a job to do in support of America and our government ? and accomplishing this mission frequently requires travel. Federal travel is resuming "business as usual." The travel industry stands ready to assist the government with our travel needs. We want travelers and agencies to feel comfortable that the policies and guidance in existence support their travel needs.

Please take time to review the following Questions and Answers and share them with federal travelers and anyone involved with travel management. Remember, GSA has the tools in place with the FTR to ensure that federal travelers can get the information they need, when they need it. If you have questions about the FTR, or need additional information, please contact: Jim Harte at 202-501-0483. Or e-mail Jim at James.Harte@gsa.gov

Guidelines for Official Federal Travelers - Emergency Situations

Part One of the Question and Answer Travel Advisory provides information and FTR guidance for employees who were traveling during the recent national tragedy and whose travel was affected by the events of September 11, 2001. Fortunately, no regulatory exceptions were needed during this period. The FTR provided the information necessary to answer the questions of travelers and travel management officials. GSA wants to ensure that agencies know how to answer employees' questions concerning the recent disruption of nationwide transportation and lodging. The recent occurrences disrupted the normal course of business -- telephone communications were sporadic and many federal travelers were left stranded with no specific guidance.

Part Two provides Questions and Answers that will help the federal traveler become familiar with the new travel procedures established as a result of our country's heightened security and transportation safety.

Questions and Answers (Q&A)

Part One

1. Who should read this travel advisory?

All federal travelers, authorizing officials and travel managers should read this advisory. This travel advisory provides guidance for federal travelers who were traveling officially and were unable to continue to their next official destination due to the circumstances caused by the recent terrorist attack. The travel advisory also applies to federal travelers who must perform a mission critical need by traveling to a disaster area.

2. May agencies select an alternate mode of transportation in lieu of travel by common carrier?

The rules governing your agency's choice of transportation method to authorize for official travel remain unchanged. (See FTR §§301-10.4 and 301-70.101). Travel by common carrier is still considered the most advantageous method of performing official travel, unless it would interfere with the performance of officials business, impose an undue hardship on the traveler, or cost more than travel by another method. While the selection of a particular mode of transportation should not be based on personal preference, in view of the recent terrorist events, agencies may take into account concerns regarding traveling by air in authorizing particular modes of transportation.

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3. If a federal traveler is unable to return to the official duty station (or other destination) as scheduled, will he/she be reimbursed for continued per diem expenses at the temporary duty location?
Yes, if the delay in returning to the official station is beyond the control of the federal traveler, and if the traveler informs the appropriate agency official that he/she is unable to return to the official duty station. The traveler should return to the official station as quickly as possible or as instructed by the agency.

4. Will the agency approve reimbursement of actual expenses?
If lodging and meal costs escalate because of the emergency situation, the agency may authorize after-the-fact approvals of actual expenses not to exceed 300 percent of the prescribed per diem rate (FTR §§301-11.302 and 301-70.200).

5. If the official duty station is located in the vicinity of the emergency, and the traveler is temporarily assigned to the rescue/recovery operation, is the traveler entitled to per diem or other travel allowances?
The FTR does not address local travel for this purpose. It is a well-established rule that the government cannot pay subsistence expenses at your official duty station, except under limited circumstances, such as when your agency has made a determination that the expenses in question are necessary during an extreme emergency involving danger to human life or the destruction of federal property.

6. If air transportation is delayed or grounded at a transfer point and/or has been re-routed to a different destination? What is the per diem rate for the traveler?
The traveler will be reimbursed the prescribed per diem rate for the location of delay or the re-routed destination. The traveler should alert the appropriate agency official.

7. Who should federal travelers call if they are confused and do not know what to do?
Federal travelers should contact their supervisor or travel approving official. Also, maintain contact with the appropriate travel agent/Travel Management Center, airline, and transportation offices for additional instructions.

Part Two

1. Where can federal travelers obtain information about airport security?
Federal travelers should check the latest airport status by accessing the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) web site at <http://www.faa.gov>. Also see GSA's web site at <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/citypairs/advisory.cfm> for additional airline instructions. Only those passengers with tickets will be allowed access to boarding areas, so it is essential to carry identification and documentation at all times.

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2. Under the heightened security standards, are e-tickets still being used?

Yes, e-tickets are valid. Currently, only ticketed passengers, including e-ticketed travelers, are permitted through the security checkpoints. Airlines require that travelers present a printed itinerary or receipt for e-tickets at check-in. If the passenger does not have a printed ticket, boarding pass, or e-ticket receipt, the passenger must return to the airport ticket counter to obtain a boarding pass in order to proceed through the security checkpoint.

3. What documentation is required at the airport?

Travelers must have one of the following documents indicating a flight departure for the current date, e-ticket receipt/itinerary, TMC/travel agency generated itinerary confirming the e-ticket, a boarding pass, or a paper ticket. All passengers will be required to show a printed ticket, boarding pass or e-ticket reservation receipt along with a valid government issued photo ID (such as a driver's license or passport) at airport security checkpoints in order to proceed to the departure gate.

4. Due to the recent hijackings of U.S. Air Carriers, may I use a foreign air carrier instead?

Your agency may authorize you to use a foreign air carrier if your agency determines that use of a foreign air carrier is necessary to avoid an unreasonable risk to your safety.

5. What must my agency do to support my use of a foreign air carrier due to the recent terrorist attack?

If your agency authorizes use of a foreign air carrier based on a determination of unreasonable risk to your safety, the agency must support its determination and approval on a case by case basis. An agency determination and approval based on a threat against a U.S. air carrier must be supported by a travel advisory notice issued by the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) and the U.S. Department of State. An agency determination and approval based on threats against Government employees or other travelers must be supported by evidence of the threat(s) that form the basis of the agency determination and approval.

6. What documentation must I use if my agency authorizes me to use a foreign air carrier due to the recent terrorist attacks on the New York City World Trade Center Towers, the Pentagon, and the aircraft that went down in Pennsylvania?

You must attach proper documentation/approval from the head of the agency to your travel authorization and to your travel claim.

7. Are there any special precautions a federal traveler should take when traveling in foreign areas?

Yes, the Department of State cautions U.S. citizens to be aware of their surroundings, maintain a low profile, vary routes and times of travel, avoid contact with anything suspicious and report anything suspicious to the local authorities. For more detailed information, consult the Department of State's Public Announcements, Travel Warnings, Consular Information Sheets, and regional travel brochures, all of which are available at the Consular Affairs Internet website at <http://travel.state.gov>.

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8. In view of the emergency circumstances and the cutback of airline service, must we continue to use the city-pair contract program airlines? Yes, it remains a requirement to use a city-pair contract air carrier. However, the FTR (§§301-10.107 and §§301-10.108) provides the only justifications for use of non-contract air carriers.

9. Are there any restrictions when renting a vehicle under the Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC) rental agreements? While GSA has not been made aware of any restrictions, MTMC has informed us that not all car rental companies under their agreements will permit one-way rentals. If they do allow one-way rentals, they may charge drop off fees or mileage rates for such one-way rentals. However, some rental companies are willing to waive drop off fees/charges on a case-by-case basis. Travelers requiring one-way rentals should, if possible, rent from companies waiving such charges.

Travelers should call HQ MTMC at 703-428-2008 if they believe drop off fees or mileage charges are improper or unjustified.

10. May agencies charter an aircraft? Yes, under certain conditions agencies may charter an aircraft. See Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-126, revised May 22, 1992 and title 41 Code of Federal Regulations 101-37. For additional information, travelers should contact GSA's Office of Government wide Policy, Aircraft Management Policy at 202-501-4866.

If you have additional questions, please contact your supervisor or your agency's travel, transportation, and/or financial policy manager. Jim Harte, OGP's Travel Policy Team Leader at 202-501-0483, is also available to assist you.

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